

Perspectives on National Growth and Development

A Compact History 1776-1976

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Introduction

Historically, the roots of national growth policy in this country can be traced to the European countries which first colonized the North American continent. England, France, Spain, The Netherlands and Russia chartered colonies, opened territories, solicited or induced population resettlement, started new towns or promoted trade and economic growth. These actions occurred virtually all along the boundaries of what later became the 48 States.

Beginning at the time of Independence, the following elements of growth policy have become embedded cumulatively in the economic and political values of American society. Individuals are free to use their talents to achieve economic self-sufficiency and to migrate freely. Private ownership of property—the home and the business—is the principal means to ensure self-sufficiency. Economic development is also to be encouraged through Federal Government help. In earlier times, this took many forms: the construction of overland and waterway transportation networks; the granting of public lands for settlement; the creation of trading centers, military posts, and transpor-

tation centers as the core of new towns; and the regulation of trade. National population growth was encouraged historically by upholding State laws which made restraints on fertility illegal, by following a virtually unrestricted immigration policy until the quotas of 1924, and by allowing deductions from Federal income tax for each additional child. More recently, there has been Federal assistance in revitalizing older cities and rural areas; providing commonly needed schools, health facilities and other public buildings; and subsidizing development of new sources of energy and the application of new sources of technology.

For two hundred years, the United States has followed such policies in one form or another. In order to examine the evolutionary course of national growth policy, it is helpful to divide American history into four time periods. These eras and their corresponding years are: survival and geographic expansion (1776–1866), industrialization and economic growth (1867–1932), recovery and war mobilization (1933–1945), and postwar growth (1946–1976).

Survival and Geographic Expansion (1776-1866)

Any nation at its outset must attempt to establish internal order and defensible borders. American growth policy during the nation's initial phase was directed at these vital goals. The Constitution was carefully framed to retain the existing institutions of the States, while assigning larger questions of economic and social order, such as currency and national defense, to the Federal Government. The War for Independence and the War of 1812 proved the young nation's ability to maintain itself as a political and social entity; the war between the North and the South at mid-century again raised and resolved the issue of survival.

The challenge of establishing defensible borders was a difficult task in the context of Spanish, French and British possessions on all the landed borders. National growth policy in physical terms became a complex process of resolving political claims and of dealing with popular expansionist urges that by the 1840's came to be known as "manifest destiny." The United States was successful in obtaining the Louisiana (1803), Florida (1819), Oregon (1846) and Gadsden (1853) territories through purchase and diplomacy, while the outcome of war brought lands under the Mexican Cession (1848) into the American fold.

Merely obtaining these lands was not sufficient; the national imperative for economic growth was directed at settling and defending

these areas. During this phase, the Federal Government gave generous gifts of Federal lands to private interest. The policy objectives were to encourage development of railroads to link sections of the country together; to induce population redistribution, e.g., under the Homestead Act of 1862; and to increase agricultural production. Earlier the Federal Government had passed the important ordinances of 1785 and 1787, governing the important northern territories between Appalachia and the Mississippi River, and played a significant role in the development of canals and waterways. These governmental activities had an enormous impact on the distribution of population and economic activity across the continent and strongly influenced the pattern of regional development.

The underlying logic of westward movement in the second half of the 19th century was one of limitless fertile plains and boundless resources waiting to be claimed in such abundance that conflicts among claimants seldom arose in a form to pose national policy issues. The historian Frederick Jackson Turner made a national name for himself in the early 20th century by elaborating how the settlers, encountering novel and different conditions on the frontier, found new ways of doing things and thus injected continuing innovations into the fabric of American society as the frontier shifted.

Industrialization and Economic Growth (1867–1932)

With the end of the Civil War, the United States completed its battle for survival and its territorial expansion from sea to sea. An agricultural revolution was beginning and industrialization was underway in urban areas based on technological innovation and a labor pool created by immigration from abroad and migration from rural areas. Resources within the expanded national boundaries were deemed infinite; the role of government became that of promoting economic growth. Some of the key growth policy questions during this period were how to inject the findings of agricultural research into the operating farms of the nation; how to get agricultural production to domestic and world markets; how to prevent monopoly and other industrial and commercial combinations in restraint of trade; how to provide employment in urban areas along with good working conditions and social justice; and how to protect the common man from the effects of large scale, impersonal production processes.

Agricultural Development

Federal governmental responses to the need for agricultural development included the creation of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the establishment of agricultural colleges in each State, and the passage of the Homestead Act. In 1887, the Hatch Experiment Station Act was approved. These Federal programs were so successful in promoting technical advancements in farming that agricultural employment began to decline toward the end of the 19th century. In the middle of the 19th century, when the Department of Agriculture was founded, two thirds of the American people, about 16 million, lived on farms and 64% of the United States workers, about 5 million, were engaged in agriculture. One century later, in 1950, only 15% or 23 million lived on farms, while 12% or 8 million were engaged in agriculture and related industries.

Immigration

To supply mushrooming industries with

cheap labor, immigration into the United States was unrestricted for decades after the Civil War. One consequence was overcrowding and deplorable living conditions in many cities. After 1924, immigration acts sought to limit the number of unskilled laborers entering the United States. The effect of such legislation upon the increasingly competitive unskilled job market was clear. According to the United States Department of Labor statistics, 27.7% of immigrants in 1910 were classified as laborers; 20 years later this figure was down to 13.3%. With the advent of quotas in 1924, legal immigration played a less prominent role in the mid-20th century growth.

Trust Busting

As the industrial might of the country grew in the post-Civil War decades, railroads and other industrial consolidations began to abuse their positions of power. The Interstate Commerce Commission was created by Congress in 1887 to regulate the railroads, and the Department of Justice was given a new institutional role in dealing with monopolies and other organizations acting in restraint of trade.

Conservation

The drive for conservation of national resources grew with the rapid urbanization of the post-Civil War era and the fear of using up our natural resources. In the latter part of the 19th century, the conservation movement in the United States led to the establishment of National Parks and National Forests to be maintained and utilized in the public interest. Use of public lands by the average citizen became an accepted part of the national heritage. However, the serious questions of pollution were left for future eras.

The American economy grew rapidly during World War I in a nation highly mobilized for wartime production and contributed mightily to the Allied victory in the form of food and war materials. The decade of the 1920's marked a return to the normalcy of *laissez faire*.

Recovery and War Mobilization (1933-1945)

With the crash of 1929 and the depression that followed, the nation was confronted with the need for recovery and the absence of a strategy through which government policies could assist in fostering recovery. The electorate turned to a new leader

In 1933, experimental and novel approaches to policy-making for national growth and recovery were formulated. The government entered as an active agent to guide national economic activity in the public interest. Proposals were made for an agricultural recovery program, unemployment relief, Federal supervision of investment securities, creation of the TVA, prevention of mortgage foreclosures on homes, railroad recovery legislation and an industrial recovery program. Congress passed virtually every proposal. Except for those set aside by the Supreme Court, these new concepts permanently changed the role and institutions of the Federal Government, particularly with respect to the stability of the agricultural sector, social security and unemployment, the bargaining power of labor, conservation, regulation of industry, concentration of wealth, banking reform, public works and public housing.

The direct impact of these activities on growth policy was more in the perception of the proper role for the Federal Government than in its specific new growth-related institutions. This orientation came as a reaction against the fluctuations of the market place and grew out of a consensus that the separate States had limited capacities to deal with the reform and recovery issues at hand.

National Planning

One of the recovery era experiments related to growth was the Federal Government's attempt at national planning. It began with the National Resources Board (1934) and its successor, the National Resource Committee of 1935. Its most mature form was the National

Resources Planning Board in 1939. These groups undertook penetrating analyses of national problems, including urbanization, and began to make recommendations. Such activity was overtaken by World War II, however, and the Board was abolished in 1943.

Resettlement

Another measure was the Resettlement Administration, created in 1935, which undertook a wide range of housing and resettlement projects across the country, in part to remove submarginal farms from cultivation and to experiment with different types of agricultural settlements. This was also in part a demonstration program for new community development initiatives, including the Greenbelt Towns, but war priorities intervened before broader efforts could be undertaken.

Regional Development

Two other measures which did have positive impacts on growth and development were the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and new public housing and mortgage insurance concepts. The TVA was controversial during the 1930's as a public corporation operating in a heretofore private realm. In practice it quickened the pace of economic development for a whole region.

Housing

The public housing concepts were designed to create jobs, eliminate slum areas and provide housing for low income families. Mortgage insurance concepts for private homeownership were embodied in the Federal Housing Administration and today still play an important role in the mortgage banking industry. FHA was instrumental in shaping the growth of suburban housing developments after World War II, particularly for those buyers whose income was not high enough to warrant conventional mortgage loans.

War Mobilization and Rapid Growth

These are examples of some of the Federal programs which, along with labor's new collective bargaining rights, aided the nation's slow economic recovery in the 1930's. It was

not until the end of that decade, however, that military assistance requests from Europe and America's own investment in war mobilization led to full employment in the span of a few years.

Postwar Growth (1946-1976)

After the war, the United States faced the problem of assimilating its wartime military personnel into the domestic job market and converting to a peacetime economy. Beyond this, the Nation had to confront the question that remains at the top of the agenda today: how can one of the most advanced societies in the world handle the problems created by unprecedented population growth, technological change, and industrial expansion?

The Employment Act of 1946 and the Housing Act of 1949

The postwar era of Federal involvement in growth was ushered in by two landmark pieces of legislation. The Employment Act of 1946 had an employment security thrust and established the national goal of full employment for the nation's expanding work force. The Housing Act of 1949 had a human settlements thrust, established the national goal of "a decent home in a suitable environment for every American family" and began the modern urban renewal program (now superseded). Together these statutes as amended speak to the two policy challenges which underlie urbanization and growth: rational economic development and orderly community development.

The two pieces of legislation stood alone rather than being linked together in a common policy. The Employment Act was oriented toward national rather than regional goals. It did not provide subgoals for regions or States; it fostered heavy reliance on national fiscal policy; it did not deal with differential growth among various regions of the country—some lagging and others prospering. Similarly, the Housing Act of 1949 was not related to decisions of where the homes should be located and to the choice between reviving older communities such as center cities versus building new communities in the suburbs or elsewhere. In short, these pieces of legislation, albeit very important,

have never been incorporated into a larger strategy or a national growth policy.

In addition to these major acts, the nation has legislated numerous other programs and enunciated a variety of national policies affecting growth.

Comprehensive Planning Assistance

In 1954, the Congress opened a new phase of Federal financial assistance to States, for the overall planning of urban development, particularly its physical dimensions. This comprehensive planning assistance program was a modest first step in focusing attention on the relationship between the development of a community and its economic base. The program has operated over the years to broaden the scope of planning which is undertaken by States and communities that receive funds: small-scale physical development planning in the late 1950's; coordinated transportation-land use planning at the metropolitan level in the early 1960's; housing planning and citizen participation in the late 1960's; and community policy planning in the early 1970's. By legislative amendment, the kinds of agencies which may receive this Federal aid now include States, cities of all population sizes, counties, Indian tribes, and metropolitan and nonmetropolitan planning and coordination agencies.

The New Federal Highway Program

A massive new program of Federal assistance to highways was initiated in 1956. This created a modern nationwide system of interstate highways and helped to develop intrastate networks which opened up vast suburban areas for the construction of new housing. There was no comparable Federal assistance to public transportation in urbanized areas; a modest beginning was made in the mid-1960's to support urban mass transportation when the economic vitality of larger cities appeared to be threatened by traffic conges-

tion and the mismatch of housing and jobs came to be recognized. In the 1970's, however, Federal aid for mass transit construction and operations was greatly increased. Coordinated planning for highways, mass transit, and airport facilities is now encouraged, and some highway construction funds may be used, at local community option, for mass transit purposes as well.

Federal Aid to Economically Lagging Areas

The first post World War II decade saw relative prosperity and growth for the country as a whole, but some areas did not participate in this prosperity. In the early 1960's, new Federal programs were established to deal with these so-called "lagging areas." Among them were the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Area Redevelopment Administration. Both sought to revive deteriorating local economies with modest appropriations. The successor Economic Development Administration has followed a type of growth center strategy, which has been selectively effective. EDA's appropriations were modest to offset powerful market economy forces and Federal procurement programs which were directing prosperity elsewhere. Moreover, other agencies with community development programs often pursued development goals at cross-purposes.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has also administered a number of important housing and infrastructure programs, including electrification, in rural communities that might be termed "lagging areas."

Proliferation of Categorical Assistance Programs

During the 1960's there was an expansion of Federal programs dealing with numerous domestic problem areas: health, education, welfare, nutrition, labor, transportation, renovation of center cities, new communities, subsidized housing, expanded public works and infrastructure assistance, rural areas and many others. By the end of the decade these programs numbered in the hundreds. They were and remain largely uncoordinated because they focus on narrow special purpose issues. They often worked at cross purposes, e.g., some helping the center city to attract industry and others helping prospering regions to grow more rapidly.

Environmental Protection

Throughout most of the history of American industrial expansion, air and water have been "free goods." Both industry and consumers have been able to use air and water as disposal systems for wastes. This situation began to change in the 1960's in response to environmental limitations with the passage of the Clean Air Act of 1965 and the Federal Water Pollution Control Act and its amendments. Direct regulation of polluters and enforcement of specific standards has begun, along with a move to reconcile industrial and metropolitan growth with environmental protection, by making pollution control either a cost of production or a decision factor in approval of new construction.

In recent years, there has been considerable new legislation in environmental areas as well as substantial amendments of existing laws. Toward the end of the 1960's, the Federal Government through a series of laws and executive orders reorganized agencies and established new ones to handle environmental policies and programs. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 in addition established the requirement of an "environmental impact statement" for all major Federal actions with significant impact on the quality of the environment. Executive Orders were issued to limit pollution from Federal facilities and to require identification and listing of all Federal structures of historical or cultural significance. Major revisions were made to the Clean Air Act in 1970 and to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972; in both cases specific abatement goals were established on a nationwide basis. Because of the relatively untested nature of many of these legal approaches, there have been numerous significant court opinions on their implementation. By contrast, in the area of land use and metropolitan development patterns, there have been relatively few court decisions of more than local interest.

Population Policy

Except for the annual quota of 400,000 legal immigrants first established in 1924, the United States historically has had an isolationist policy with regard to population growth. However, recent resource congestion, growth of some areas to huge dimensions,

immigration to magnitudes currently estimated as high as 800,000 to 1 million annually, and the maturation of the postwar "baby boom" into the household-formation stage have posed new policy issues. These center on the question of how the country can accommodate further population growth from natural increase, legal immigration, and illegal immigration.

Although limitation on the future size of population has never been a long-standing or explicit policy of the United States, the national government now supports research, subsidizes family planning, and has encouraged national debate on the topic.

In the 1960's, Federal funds were used to do research on human reproduction and fertility control. Government sponsored birth control programs were developed and funded; by the end of FY 1974, these had assisted more than 3,300,000 American women. In this period also, the U.S. Supreme Court declared unconstitutional certain State laws which had outlawed interference with natural reproduction.

In early 1970, the first Presidential message on population was delivered, and the Congress responded later that year by authorizing a Commission on Population Growth and the American Future. This Commission's report in 1972 concluded that the nation should "welcome and plan for population stabilization" and that ending population growth would contribute significantly to the nation's ability to solve its problems.

The ACIR Report on "Urban and Rural America: Policies for Future Growth" (1968)

The Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, drawing heavily on State and local officials, triggered extensive discussion on national growth policy in a landmark 1968 report. The Commission observed that community and regional development is the outcome of countless public and private sector decisions; that much Federal legislation has exerted a significant influence on the direction of urban and economic growth; and that the role of State and local governments was critical in guiding growth, given their direct responsibility for influencing (or failing to influence) the location of industry and people through control over land use.

The Commission called for "immediate establishment of a national policy for guiding the location and character of future urbanization involving Federal, State and local governments in collaboration with the private sector of the national economy."

At the State level, the Commission also stressed certain institutional and procedural reforms including: the coordination of State, multicounty, metropolitan and local planning; relating such planning to regional and national considerations; conformity of programs and projects of State agencies to a State urbanization plan; and formal review by an appropriate State agency for conformance with the State plan of metropolitan area and multicounty plans and of those local comprehensive plans, implementing ordinances, and projects having an impact outside the jurisdiction's borders. The Commission recommended that multicounty planning agencies be assigned responsibility to review applications for Federal or State physical development project grants in nonmetropolitan as well as metropolitan areas, and that State legislatures provide a means to assure continuing systematic review of the progress toward a State policy dealing with urban growth.

The Commission also urged Congress and the President to reassess the policies and structure of existing and proposed Federal multistate commissions for economic development. In these various ways, the Commission recognized that the development of a national policy on growth, involving the various levels, is as much a matter of strengthening and redirecting governmental institutions and reorienting and coordinating existing programs as it is a question of launching new programs.

The Urban Growth and New Communities Development Act of 1970

By this Act, Congress mandated a comprehensive Executive Branch process of study to develop a national urban growth and stabilization policy giving coherence and rationality to what heretofore have been isolated and uncoordinated Federal policies and programs. The study process was to lead to formulation of a biennial report from the President to the Congress, analyzing growth trends and problems in the nation, and recommending how government and the private

sector should handle such problems. The Act also provided for expanded Federal aids to help develop new communities and demonstrate that governments and builders could coordinate their efforts to produce pre-planned large scale, securely financed, adequately serviced communities. The scale of new community assistance, as with EDA programs, was modest so that the Federal role was necessarily one of supporting selected demonstrations, rather than wholesale change in the process of community development in the United States.

The Agricultural Act of 1970 and the Rural Development Act of 1972

These two pieces of legislation also bear directly on national growth policy. The Agriculture Act directs executive agencies to locate and maintain insofar as practicable

new Federal offices and facilities in areas or communities of lower population density. The Rural Development Act enlarged the mission of the Department of Agriculture to include nonfarm rural affairs as well as agricultural matters, and directed the Secretary of Agriculture to establish, and report on progress toward attaining goals for rural areas. New rural categorical aid programs were authorized and the Secretary of Agriculture was directed to give preference to different size "rural" communities for different purposes.

The American history of national policies affecting growth is one of evolution and adaptation to changing conditions and needs. Unlike some countries that are geographically smaller, less pluralistic, or more centralized with respect to the national government's power, the United States clearly does not have an explicit overall policy regarding growth.

Instead, there is at any time a "de facto" national growth policy in the form of a collection of constitutional safeguards and rights and Federal programs and policies. All these are superimposed on, or made available to, State and local governments as the latter administer their own functions and deliver services to their people. This is particularly true with respect to national urban growth policy, or human settlements policy, i.e., the composite of Federal actions which influence the national distribution and accommodation of population in communities across the territory of the United States. But it is true also of national growth policy in the larger sense of resource utilization, economic policies, rural matters, and environmental and social concerns not uniquely associated with urban development.

This de facto national growth policy is dynamic and flexible, and it permits the Federal Government to create, terminate, consolidate or modify programs and policies according to changing conditions and according to new needs and priorities. Historically, it has permitted the country to accommodate territorial expansion, population growth, and agricultural revolution, massive urbanization, industrialization, technological change, and increased environmental awareness.

But this de facto policy—critics call it "inadvertent growth policy"—also has serious disadvantages. Being implicit, it is not generally understood; it often generates unintended and undesirable side effects; some functional policies are usually in conflict with

other policies with resultant waste of public monies.

In the perspective of this selective capsule history, it is highly unlikely that responsible Americans who call for a more formal national growth policy really want a static policy that will govern for all time. Instead, they want to see the Federal Government coordinate its compartmentalized policies and institutions more effectively each year; and they want to see treatment of what today are gaps in policy or unforeseen and undesirable consequences of policies prevailing in various compartmentalized sectors. Above all, they want to see attention given to the cost advantages and disadvantages of different geographical configurations of human settlements and industrial complexes.

In one forum after another, ranging from the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations to hearings before Congressional committees or before units of the Executive Branch, observers in 1975 have critiqued this de facto growth policy from numerous points of view.

The Federal Government on balance continues to sanction or encourage national population growth, albeit not as vigorously as before, but takes no policy position on **where** this population increase—perhaps 50 to 80 million by the year 2000 from a combination of natural increase, legal immigration and illegal immigration—can most effectively be accommodated geographically in the U.S. The Federal Government remains mute on the conclusion of the Commission on Population and the American Future that additional population will not contribute to our ability to solve our current problems.

The Federal Government has promoted industrialization of agriculture, but provides limited assistance to

those persons displaced from the economic mainstream by such industrialization of agriculture for resettlement in economically viable communities

The Federal Government has fostered the suburbanization of much of the better educated and more highly paid Americans. It has not prevented the centralization of many of the poor, the aged and the minorities in older central cities, and there is no long range, effective policy to mitigate the consequences of this socio-economic segregation or to obviate the need for busing which is not generally accepted as the final solution to such segregation

Recently, population growth has shifted away from the 10 largest metropolitan areas, except for Boston. Population is growing in smaller metropolitan areas and in some remote rural areas. But, in the absence of overall settlement policies, there is no Federal mechanism to encourage economically viable and attractive communities to accommodate this migratory movement; no means to discourage further suburban and rural sprawl and its expensive infrastructure and cost-of-service implications; and no means for avoiding the increased energy requirements for commuting

The Federal Government has preferentially supported the highway and the automobile as the primary means of interstate and local transportation, but, in response to petroleum shortages and skyrocketing costs, the Federal Government has not yet sharply modified its policies to reduce dependence on the private automobile and imported petroleum.

Observers have noted the fragmentation of municipal government and jurisdictions in most metropolitan areas, yet there is no national policy to encourage State governments to promote metropolitanwide coordination of selected planning and urban services.

The Nation until recent years has preferred to overlook the effects of

pollution or sought to correct damage to the environment resulting from the processes of economic activity or physical development, rather than to provide incentives designed to bring about changes in the processes themselves.

Federal, State and local actions and policies for growth and development react to rather than anticipate private development. The result is that infrastructure and services must often be provided for communities with geographic configurations that impose high, even prohibitive, costs of service. This policy of reaction leaves almost entirely to private decisions the allocation and direction of geographic shifts of population and economic activity irrespective of the inefficiencies of high public sector costs often imposed on the taxpayer.

The Federal Government has provided assistance for local facilities and services to needy communities across the land through a thousand or more narrow, special-purpose programs. These programs are so numerous that their impact cannot be comprehended, individually or collectively, much less managed locally and directed toward consistent and worthy public goals. In spite of recent progress toward simplification and consolidation, many of these Federal policies and programs still work at cross purposes to offset and neutralize each other with resultant waste of Federal, State and local monies.

Our present de facto growth policy and these illustrative criticisms come on the heels of 200 years of national concern about maintaining individualism in the pursuit of economic security by households and businesses. The pressure of changing issues and needs, however, call for contemporary assessment of the proper role of government in promoting economic growth and livable communities and the balance between unrestrained private use of land and the achievement of community welfare.

These concerns—and the search for a unifying logic or strategy—promise to remain central issues of national policy toward growth as the United States enters its third century.